

Chinchilla Showing in the UK

by Claire Davidson



This article is the first of a series focusing on chinchilla showing in the UK. Little is published about chinchilla showing outside of the society which organises shows, so this aims to give a brief overview of the history and an introduction to chinchilla showing.

Chinchilla showing in the UK dates back to the 1950s. Chinchillas were originally imported from the US as part of the fur industry and the organisation was therefore, named the "Chinchilla Fur Breeders' Association" (CFBA).

The association was formed to allow breeders to compete against each other, to compare animals, and to learn about and improve husbandry practices. Their main aim was to breed chinchillas with the best quality fur.

Whilst fur farming has now been banned in the UK the contribution which these early breeders made to chinchilla husbandry and health cannot be underestimated.

In the 1990s the CFBA was rebranded as the National Chinchilla Society (NCS), reflecting the change in society's perceptions of fur farming. As an organisation the CFBA had increasingly become the target for animal rights' activists and members

were verbally attacked for keeping chinchillas, even though many breeders by this time were keeping them purely as a hobby and had nothing to do with the fur trade.

Chinchilla shows were not very well advertised outside of the NCS for fear of animal rights' campaigners disrupting the shows and causing problems. From talking to one long standing NCS member, it seems that shows became very insular and were sometimes held behind closed doors with no members of the public being allowed into the hall.

Thankfully those days are now gone and keeping chinchillas as pets and showing them as a hobby is much more acceptable. Members of the public are more than welcome to attend shows and see some of the most stunning chinchillas at close quarters.

I am not sure the "stigma" attached to the origins of fur farming will disappear entirely and the showing of chinchillas is still based primarily on fur qualities but the NCS is an organisation of dedicated enthusiasts who keep chinchillas for the joy of the animal.

The NCS is a relatively small organisation compared to other companion animal organisations. Members

are scattered over the entire country and shows are held in each of the 4 regions (Scottish, Northern, Wales & West Midlands, Southern) throughout the colder months: the end of September through to the National which is usually held at the beginning of April.

Holding shows during the winter means that the chinchillas have attained their full winter coats and (hopefully) are in prime.

A chinchilla in full prime is stunning to behold – it is the condition every show breeder hopes an animal will attain just before a show and especially for the National.

Each region organises its own shows; usually 3 per season so that shows are not too crowded together (since it is rightly considered unfair on the chinchillas to be taken to shows too frequently) and so that dates do not clash.

Shows are held on a Sunday at suitable village halls. Entries can vary between 50 to 100 animals, with the National often seeing 200 animals or more to be judged.

My next article will outline the preparation necessary for showing chinchillas and the equipment needed etc. A further article will describe a typical show day.